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ABSTRACT

The need for research which will provide old people's evaluation of what is positive or negative about beliefs and opinions of other age groups about the aged forms the basis for the research proposed in this report. Six sections are included. The introduction, section 1, covers statement of the problem, and the purpose, need, assumptions, limitation, and hypotheses of the proposed study. The second section, Review of Literature, is an examination of the content and method of procedures of past research on the aged. The third section, Theoretical Orientation, discusses two theoretical approaches which note the relationship of attitudes toward the aged and their adjustment in later life. Procedure of the Study, the fourth section, briefly discusses the proposed study's sample, data and instrumentation, scaling method, and data analyses. The fifth section discusses implications of previous studies, noting and restating the need for further research due to the inconsistency in findings of research on attitudes toward the aged. The final section, Dissemination and Use, is a brief statement of how the proposed research findings could be used: To provide valid bases for parent education programs for intergenerational living to create positive environments for those who are presently old and for the future older generations. (SH)

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OLD PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES TOWARD OTHER AGE GROUPS' BELIEFS AND OPINIONS ABOUT THE AGED

Research Proposal Presented at

The Adult Education Research Conference

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1. INTRODUCTION

Interest and concern for the old have gained momentum as the number of aged persons in the population continues to increase. Demographic data composed by Brotman (1968) project that by 1990 there will be 27 million persons over 65 and 40%, or more than 10 million, will be 75 years and over. At least every tenth American will be over 65 years of age.

Attention has focused on the conditions related to the factors which, according to the United States Statutory Law (42 §3001) affect the ability and right of the aged to live a quality of life in keeping with the traditional American concept of the inherent dignity of the individual in our democratic society. A significant variable to be addressed which affects the quality of life of the aged is the pervasive attitudes about being old which exist in our society.

Assessment of attitudes toward older people has generated extensive research in social gerontology. Attention has focused on the prevalence of negative stereotypes and opinions about the aged and attempts to measure accurately the extent and distribution of these views. Since 1953 various instruments have been developed and adapted for these purposes. Although findings and conclusions have been inconsistent and sometimes contradictory, researchers have concluded in general that old people live in a negative social climate.

Knowledge of the pervasive attitudes toward the old in society and observation of the behavior of large numbers of aged persons have led to formulation of aging theories to explain poor self-concept and consequent behavior among the aged (Cumming and Henry, 1961; Kuypers and Bengston, 1973;

Rosow, 1974). However, recent research by Brubaker and Powers (1976), Brubaker (1976), and the National Council on Aging (1975) conclude that although other age groups evaluate being old negatively, old people do not necessarily have negative attitudes about being old or view being old as a negative experience. There is a need for research which will provide understanding of the discrepancies between theories based on observation of negative behavior among the aged and findings in research that old people do not necessarily evaluate being old negatively.

Research has not been found cited which analyzed or measured old people's perception of the social context in which they are living. Concepts from symbolic interactional theory from social psychology as posited by Mead (1953), Goffman (1961), Stryker (1959), and Kuypers and Bengston (1973) can provide bases to investigate how old people evaluate other age groups' attitudes toward being old and the consequent affect on their behavior. Findings in research from this approach may provide insight on the discrepancies between how old people report they feel about themselves and how they act within a larger context of society. Findings can provide valid bases for parent and adult education programs.

1.1. Statement of Problem

The problem of this study is to determine whether old people affectively evaluate societal opinions and beliefs about aged persons' physical changes, and loss of work and social roles as negative, positive, or neutral. Old people's affective evaluation will be obtained using statements from instruments from which researchers have concluded that other age groups negatively evaluate the aged. This research will obtain old people's evaluation of those beliefs and opinions unmediated by experts. Old people themselves will determine what

is negative, positive, or neutral.

1.2. Purpose

The purpose of this study is threefold:

1. To provide data for assessing the social context in which old people perceive they are living.

2. To obtain data which will provide insight into the experience of old age for the aged in contrast to how other age groups affectively evaluate being old.

3. To advance gerontology through a methodological approach in which the meaning of aging for old people is obtained as a criterion for determining what is negative, positive, or neutral about beliefs and opinions about the aged.

1.3. Need for the Study

Findings from recent research that either included or utilized old age samples are contradictory with respect to how the aged view being old (Aisenberg, 1964; Bell and Sanfield, 1973; Brubaker, 1976; Brubaker and Powers, 1976; Crouch, 1972; Kastenbaum and Durkee, 1964; National Council on Aging, 1975). It appears that the assumption that aging is a negative experience cannot be accepted for all old people. To expedite the development of social psychological theory in gerontology, there is need to examine the discrepancies between the assumptions of empirically based aging theory and recent research findings that old people do not necessarily evaluate being old negatively.

Although societal evaluation of old people may vary, the following is the conclusion of many researchers on attitudes about the old:

> There is a general devaluation of the aged. Whether they are simply indifferent or actively discriminatory, the young and middle-aged basically do not accept the old. They view them in stereotypical fashion so familiar to students of prejudice. Their stereotypes are also remarkably resistent to change from exposure to, familiarity and contact with older persons. The aged,

> incidentally, are the only minority group for which this is true. Close contact frequently destroys social distance and invidious stereotypes about other devalued groups. But this does not apply to the aged. Negative images of them are impressively impervious to exposure and contact. (Rosow, 1967:32-33).

Previous research has focused on attitudes and perceptions of others about the aged, the aged's perception of themselves, and their perception of age in relation to other age groups. From these perspectives, theory has been formulated, programs planned, and intervention methods instituted. However, research has not been carried out which attempted to define old people's perception of the social context in which they are living. The need for this approach for insight and understanding the behavior of the aged was concluded by Miymoto (1964) after examination of a number of studies concerned with the level of interaction among aged people and the relationship to their personal adjustment and health. He suggested that:

> One of the best ways to understand the social adjustment problem of the aged is to see them from the standpoint of the person. Those who suffer from aging appear to be those who see themselves as very old, as in bad health, as a burden on others, and as being isolated. In short, the aged person's perception of his world and of himself may be a more critical determinant of his adjustment to actual facts of what his world is or how or what he is (Preston and Gudisek, 1966:63).

Blumer (1969) stated that the posture of both psychological and social science fields today is the tendency to treat human behavior as the product of various factors that play upon human beings. Concern is with the behavior and with the factors regarded as producing them. He posits that:

> . . .psychologists turn to such factors as stimuli, attitudes, conscious motives, various kinds of psychological inputs, perception and cognition and various features of personal organization to account for given forms or instances of human conduct. In a similar fashion sociologists rely on such factors as social position, status demands, social roles, cultural prescriptions, norms and values, social pressures, and group affiliation to provide such explanations. In both such typical psychological and sociological explanations the meaning of things for the human beings who are acting are either bypassed or swallowed up in the factors used to account for their behavior (Blumer, 1969:65).

There is need for research which will provide old people's evaluation of what is positive or negative about beliefs and opinions other age groups have about the aged. Research has not been found cited in which what researchers have concluded as negative is based on aged persons' evaluation of being old.

1.4. Assumptions of the Study

Old people in the sample are characteristic of other old people in similar size towns.

1.5. Limitation of the Study

This study is limited to functioning old people who are not adjudged as senile or bedridden. It will include handicapped and minorities.

1.6. Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses will be tested:

1. Old people will negatively evaluate beliefs and opinions other age groups have toward physical changes of the aged.
2. Old people will negatively evaluate beliefs and opinions other age groups have toward receiving financial assistance.
3. Old people will negatively evaluate beliefs and opinions other age groups have toward loss of parenting roles.
4. There will be no relationship between old people's evaluation of beliefs and opinions of others and their own self perception.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Definition of Attitude

What is an attitude has been a prominent and debatable issue in social psychological research (Allport, 1935). Implicit in much research and explicit by definition is the assumption that attitudes are significant determinants of

subsequent behavior. Attitude has been defined as "a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object (Fishbein, 1965:36; 1975:6). This has been the classical accepted definition used, although not without criticism. Fishbein (1975) observed that lack of explicit differentiation in this definition of attitude from other variables has been a source of ambiguity. He notes that three basic features are conveyed in the definition of attitude. These features are: "(1) attitudes are learned; (2) that they predispose action; and (3) that such actions are consistently favorable or unfavorable toward the object (Fishbein, 1975).

To help clarify and distinguish attitude from other closely related variables Fishbein (1975) delineated three concepts which emerge from these features which are important for understanding attitudes as affect, cognition, and conation. Each of these concepts relates differently to the components of an attitude.

> Affect refers to a person's feelings toward and evaluation of some object, person, issue, or event. Cognition denotes his knowledge, opinions, beliefs, and thoughts about the object; and conation refers to his behavioral intentions and his actions with respect to or in the presence of the object. Since, when dealing with attitudes, we are concerned with predisposition to behave rather than with the behavior itself, it seems desirable to make a distinction between behavioral intention and actual behavior.
>
> Whereas attitude refers to a person's favorable or unfavorable evaluation of an object, beliefs represent the information he has about the subject. Specifically, a belief links an object to some attribute.
>
> In sum, the concept "attitude" should be used only when there is strong evidence that the measure employed places an individual on a bipolar affective dimension. When the measure places the individual on a dimension of subjective probability relating an object to an attribute, the label "belief" should be applied. When the probability dimension links the person to a behavior, the concept "behavioral intention" should be used (Fishbein, 1975:12-13).

Fishbein stressed the importance of distinguishing between beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors, although acknowledging that there is a relationship between these variables. The affective, evaluative component comprises the

distinguishing characteristic which determines an attitudinal feature. There is need, therefore, to determine whether attitudes, which involve an evaluative component, or some closely related variables have been researched.

2.2. Attitudes of Other Age Groups toward the Aged

Investigations of the content of attitudes of subjects in specific age groups have been one method used to determine what has been reported as attitudes of children, youth, young adults, middle aged and the old toward aging. There also have been investigations of attitudes held by personnel who work with the aged.

The most frequently researched group to determine attitudes about being old has been college students (Brubaker, 1976:32). Tuckman and Lorge's (1952, 1953) instrument to assess attitudes toward the old consists of 137 statements classified into thirteen categories labeled as misconceptions and stereotypes about old people. The categories consist of physical, financial, conservatism, family, attitude toward future, insecurity, mental deterioration, activities and interests, personality traits, best time of life, sex, cleanliness, and interference. Conclusions after each administration of this instrument were that the subjects believed and accepted misconceptions and stereotypes about old people. Although this questionnaire does not provide a means for assessing the affective evaluative dimension of the subjects, it has been frequently used in social gerontological research to determine attitudes toward the old.

Tuckman and Lorge (1953) state that their:

> study illustrates that there is a substantial acceptance of the misconception and stereotypes about old people. It is obvious that the responses of the group were based on a limited knowledge of the aging process obtained through observations of parents, relatives, and older acquaintances or through observations of their own aging and not on any experimental evidence (p. 259).

Implications drawn from responses to the questionnaire were that graduate students look upon old age as a period characterized by economic insecurity, poor health, loneliness, resistance to change and failing physical and mental powers. It was concluded that old people are living in a social climate which is not conducive to feelings of adequacy, usefulness, and security, and to good adjustment in their later life.

Kogan (1961) developed a Likert Scale to assess the direction as well as the content of the stereotype of old age among college students. Statements were designed to measure attitudes pertaining to residential aspects of old age, feelings of comfort or tension when around old people, extent to which old people vary, interpersonal relations between age generation, dependency and cognitive style of old people, and personal appearances and personality of old people. Kogan (1961) found a significant relationship between feelings of anomie and attitudes toward old people. Subjects with nurturant personalities were found to have positive attitudes toward the old. Rosencrantz and McNevin (1969) assessed the attitudes of college students toward the aged by means of a semantic differential which included thirty-two bipolar items. Factor analysis yielded three major dimensions which were differentially attributed to the young, middle-aged, and older males. These factors were termed instrumental-ineffective, autonomous-dependent, and personal acceptability dimensions. Positive attitudes toward the old required the old to receive a high score in the dimensions. To score high on the instrumental-ineffective dimension, the old had to be considered capable of actively pursuing goals and adaptive to change. Old people were judged low. A high score on the autonomous-dependent dimension required subjects to perceive the old as contributors of as much energy to the functioning of their social system as they derived from others for their personal maintenance. The third dimension, acceptability-unacceptability, required old people not to be

perceived as having difficulty in their social milieu in order to score high. This was considered to reflect a positive attitude. In this study recognition of changes in physical, social, and economic status of old people differing from younger ages was concluded as an indication of negative attitude. Therefore, the basis on which high scores could be gained in this study precludes the subjects reflecting a positive attitude toward the aged if they acknowledged realistic characteristics of changes that may occur in the process of becoming old.

The attitude content of children and youth toward the old has been assessed through use of literature. Essays written by 208 third graders were analyzed in a study conducted by Hickey, Hickey, and Kalish (1968). Physical differences perceived between the elderly and others were categorized as ambulatory, visual and auditory, skin and complexion changes, and feeble. Perceptions of the old as kind or friendly occurred approximately three times as often as perceptions of the old as mean and unfriendly.

Peterson and Karnes (1976) analyzed literature to determine the types, extent and importance of older characters in adolescent literature, the attitude conveyed by the authors, and the differences among older characters who appear in books at various time periods. Peterson and Karnes (1976) found, as did Seltzer and Atchley (1971), that the attitudes toward the old portrayed were not negative. These authors concluded that the important impact in this study is the indirect picture of the older population that was shown. In an overwhelming number of cases, older people were portrayed as only shadows who are not major participants in society.

Lane (1964) adapted the Tuckman and Lorge "Old People's Questionnaire" to assess the attitudes toward the old of 400 high school and college students. An analysis of the responses indicated that their attitudes were generally

favorable, although very few perceived the aged in a way to imply very favorable or unfavorable attitudes. Lane (1964) stated that the implication of this apparent neutralism of youth toward the elderly is that aged persons in association with youth may be existing in a climate of tolerance rather than acceptance and responsiveness (p. 230).

Articles relating to adjustment and problems of children of aged parents inferred some attitudes that may be held by middle aged adults. Stern (1952) implied that the middle aged children's attitudes are lack of concern for old people's desire for independence in living arrangements, negative attitudes for single aging parents seeking out intimate relationships with the opposite sex and an expectation of old adults not to have interests of their own.

Kolberg, Cohen, and Mendlovitz (1972) compared supervisors' attitudes in a home for the aged. One finding in this study was that the scores of registered nurses were significantly lower than those of the social workers that responded on the instrument. Although cautions were stated that must be taken into consideration in the interpretation of the findings in the above study, the researchers felt it merits attention in that "nursing supervisors control the activities and influence the attitudes and expectations of the most predominant and important occupational group in the institution." (Kolberg, Cohen, and Mendlovitz, p. 244). Nurses have more contact with patients often than any other persons.

The attitudes of staffs at institutions for the aged were an issue addressed at the Twenty-eighth Gerontological Society Meeting (Aging, 1976). At this meeting, the following was reported by several participants:

> Staff members must choose between being staff or patient oriented. Whereas the majority choose the latter, persons who chose to ally themselves with the patients found themselves in conflict with the staff and administration. Dignity is rare in nursing home interactions. . . This lack of dignity is especially evident where bodily functions are concerned (Aging, January, 1976:19).

Questionnaires were sent out to 435 psychiatrists from which 175 responses were obtained. Negative feelings expressed most often by psychiatrists were impatience and boredom with elderly patients and resentment of the physical and mental deterioration evident in so many of the aged. A few mentioned they felt inadequate to treat older patients (Lutz, 1972:166). Kogan's "Attitude Towards Old People's Scale" was used with 120 students and practitioners in service to the elderly in which younger respondents and those having more years of education expressed more positive attitudes toward old people (Thorson, 1974:317).

2.3. Attitudes of Old People

Attitudes of the aged toward being old have also been studied. Stinnett, Collins, and Montgomery (1970) developed an instrument to measure the extent of satisfaction which older husbands and wives express concerning the fulfillment of certain needs involved in the marriage relationship during the later years. Fifty-three percent of the respondents perceived the present as the happiest period of their lives. In another study, eleven healthy persons, members of a senior citizen's creative writing class, authored essays describing how it felt to grow old. Analysis of their essays revealed that although they did not appear to be experiencing feelings of having changed from participants in living to observers, the central theme of loss emerged (Roberts and Kinsey, 1972).

In recent research findings, the attitudes reported have been that older people have positive attitudes toward their being old. However, concomitant with the positive self-evaluation, has been the belief that having a positive experience in old age is an exception rather than a general experience. The National Council on Aging (1975) has conducted an extensive study to determine the public's

attitude toward aging and its perception of what it is like to be old in this country as well as to document older American's views and attitudes toward themselves and their personal experience of being old. A total of 4,254 in-person household interviews were made in this study which included a cross section of the public 18 years and older. An additional representative sample of the public 65 years and over was surveyed in order to provide adequate numbers of older people for detailed analysis of their conditions and attitudes. From the data collected in this study, it was concluded that the reality of old age has been masked by myths. The authors state:

> It is not the young alone who have negative expectations of old age. The older public themselves have embraced the stereotypes and myths of old age, and recognizing that life is not so terrible for them, consider themselves the exception to the rule (NCOA, 1975).

These types of findings have resulted in some researchers concluding that society's perception of how old people feel and theories of aging that imply dissatisfaction with life may be incorrect. However, aging theories have been posited in attempts to explain observed behavior among many of the aged. The means of investigation which have produced the data for the conclusions of the studies of positive feelings among the aged have come primarily from self reports of large numbers of elderly.

Research with male subjects in rural Iowa further supported the findings that the aged report satisfaction in their living during the later years of their life (Brubaker, 1976). These studies, based on self reports, also conclude tnat many aged persons have positive self evaluation of themselves. However, in the National Council on Aging survey and the Brubaker study, attitudes toward self were not related to observed behavior of the old, which may be the outcome of perception of other age groups' attitudes.

3. THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

To demonstrate the importance of the meanings for the aged of their evaluation of others' attitudes toward being old, two theoretical approaches are discussed which note the relationship of attitudes toward the aged and their adjustment in later life. Kuypers and Bengston's (1973) theory of socialization of older persons used in recent theoretical development and concepts from symbolic interaction theory will be discussed as an approach to build theoretical conceptualization on the meaning of the aged's evaluation of perceptions of others about being old.

The Social Breakdown Syndrome, which is grounded in labeling theory, was developed in relation to mental illness. This approach emphasized that mental disorders are related to social environmental factors. Kuypers and Bengston (1973) applied the concepts to ". . .normal aged individuals in a society that presents an environment conducive to negative labeling" (p. 187).

Seven steps are delineated to illustrate the dynamic relationship between an individual and the environment. These are applicable to the aged as follows:

(1) "Precondition of susceptibility"--as a result of "the confusion, vagueness or lack of specificity of standards for appropriate behavior";

(2) "Dependence on external labeling" from absence of normative structure to provide specified modes of conduct that may be internalized;

(3) "Social labeling as incompetent"--the elderly are evaluated as inadequate, useless, obsolete, and incompetent either directly or indirectly;

(4) "Induction into a sick, dependent role" brought on by retirement, loss of spouse and associates;

(5) "Learning of 'skills' appropriate" to the new dependent role--the retired person no longer occupies his time with work activities and must acquire new behaviors to occupy his time;

(6) "Atrophy of previous skills"--unemployment results in degeneracy of skills; and

(7) "Identification and self-labeling as sick or inadequate"--the old person accepts and identifies with the negative label of old age.

Implicit in applying the Social Breakdown Syndrome to old age are: (1) the assumption that old people are evaluated by society as useless, obsolete, and worthless, and, (2) that old people subscribe to these evaluations (Brubaker, 1976:23).

A second theoretical orientation which has been applied to normal aging are concepts from symbolic interaction theory as formulated by Mead (1936) as an approach to the study of human group life and human conduct. Blumer (1969) outlined the nature of symbolic interaction and Kimmel (1974) applied the concepts in an attempt to illustrate the aging process.

Blumer (1969) states that symbolic interactions rest on three simple premises:

> The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them. Such things include all that the human being may note in his world including physical objects and human beings. The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the experiences he encounters.

Blumer states that the:

> term symbolic interaction refers to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings interpret or "define" each others actions instead of merely reacting to each others actions. Their "response" is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on meaning which they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions. This mediation is equivalent to inserting a process of interpretation between stimulus and response in the case of human behavior (1969:79).

Rose (1965) further explicates symbolic interaction theory as follows:

> 1) human society is made up of individuals who have selves (that is make indications to themselves); 2) that individual action is a construction and not a release, being built up by the individual through noting and interpreting features of the situations in which he acts; and 3) that group or collective action consists of aligning of individual actions, brought about by the individual's interpreting or taking account of each other's actions (Blumer:82).

In addition to the works of Mead (1953), Meltzer (1975) observed that the historical underpinnings of these three premises are found in C.H. Cooley's theory of society, J. Dewey's formulation of the concept of habit, and W.I. Thomas' notion of the definition of the situation. Kuypers and Bengston's theory of social breakdown as applied to the normal aging process provides the basis for statements which represent variables which old people are believed to encounter in aging. Symbolic interactionism theory provides a vehicle for investigating the meaning for old people that these variables have from the standpoint of the aging individual in society.

4. PROCEDURE OF THE STUDY

4.1. Sample

The sample will include 200 persons 65 years and older living within a fifty mile radius of Waterloo and Ames, Iowa. Instruments will be administered by the researcher to randomly selected groups. A randomly selected group of persons receiving meals on wheels will be sent an instrument by home delivery with the meals.

4.2. Data and Instrumentation

A. Device assessing the following characteristics will be developed or adapted:

The aged affective bipolar evaluation of statements of opinions and beliefs other age groups have about:

Physical changes 15 - 20 items

Loss of work roles 15 - 20 items

Loss of parenting roles 15 - 20 items

B. For all devices, establish

1. Content validity by experts in the field of aging
2. Reliability
3. Pretest for clarity and ease of response with 10 - 15 subjects 65 and over but not included in sample

A numeric rating scale in which respondents are asked to check a number to express their rating will be developed using items from instruments used to measure attitudes of other age groups toward the aged (Lemon, 1973:86). Respondents will also be asked whether they agree or disagree that the belief or opinion is characteristic of themselves.

4.3. Scaling Method

The Thurstone type method of attitude construction will use aged persons as judges to judge the position of a set of opinions statements on an attitude continuum ranging from extremely favorable to extremely unfavorable. Thurstone's scaling method does not require that the judges in any sense need be experts in attitude measurement, but they should be persons who will give some care to the task assigned them (Lemon, 1973:168; Remmers, 1972:80-84).

4.4. Data Analyses

Variables will be quantified by the following procedure:

A. The Thurstone scaling technique will be used to develop a continuum by tabulating frequency, computing medium, and interquartile range for each statement.

B. Correlation coefficients for the relationship between old people's evaluations of beliefs and opinions of others and their own self-perceptions will be computed.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY

The attitudes of the groups surveyed are examples of the social context in which social gerontologists have concluded the aged exist and interact. These attitudes provide the basis from which old people form their perception of the attitudes of society toward oldness. There is no consistency in the findings of researchers of attitudes toward the old. Regardless of the inconsistency, some problems which may be contributing to the atmosphere of low esteem that is felt to exist toward the old seem evident from the survey. Except for data collected, by Kogan's (1961) instrument, throughout the literature it is difficult to discern if recognition and acknowledgement of characteristics and traits that may occur during the aging process are considered as negative attitudes toward the old. It seems that a very subtle underlying concept that is being perpetuated is that positive attitudes toward the old mean not accepting changes that come with aging that are related to physical and health changes, mental or emotional changes, and financial and economic changes. Although attitudes toward aging may be based on some negative stereotypes, it becomes problematic when cognizance of traits that are correlates of old age, such as physical changes, are interpreted as evidence of low esteem by society and as something undesirable, to be avoided and masked at any cost, and generally to be treated as non-existent. Out of concern and desire for positive attitudes to be held toward the aged, social gerontologists and others in society who work in behalf of the old may be providing the aged with a disservice.

The aged, similar to minorities who have cultural patterns and physical characteristics different from the majority, through conscious efforts, can come to accept and value their differences. Blau (1973) states that:

> People will try hard, as Freud demonstrated, to protect themselves from the pain and threat of social rejection. Ego threats mobilize the individual's defense mechanisms such as denial and rationalization (p. 153).

Old people do not exist in a vacuum in society unaware of the attitudes of persons not old and without memory of their attitude during earlier years toward being old. Concepts from the psycho-social and symbolic interaction framework may help explain the inconsistencies between research findings and empirical observations of behavior reported among the aged. In both the psycho-social and symbolic interactional approaches, the attitudes of others as they are perceived by the individual and definition of the situation as mediating forces for determining behavior have relevance for attempts to understand the relationships among the attitudes of society, the attitudes of old people, and their behavior. Several separate yet related issues appear to be involved.

First, if old people believe that society feels that being old is bad, even if they are accepting the experience of old as not bad, their behavior will be affected by the prevalent attitude of society in the presentation of self in their everyday living among persons who are felt to negatively evaluate them.

Secondly, in assessing attitudes, it is difficult to determine whether attitudes toward being old are being assessed or researchers are asking subjects if they believe characteristics that may occur in aging are actual characteristics of the old.

Thirdly, researchers have taken what old people say they feel about being old to be reliable information in spite of knowledge that old people are living in a society whose values are youth oriented. To accept these reports as fact is to

ignore the important influence of environment on behavior and feelings that persons have in the presentation of self in everyday life in situations where they are defined as valueless.

Concluding that the social environment in which old people live does not affect the quality of their lives has the danger that the old presently and in the future will continue to live lives that lack "quality" even if the health and economic problems with which old people are faced are solved.

There is also need for adult and parent education programs for individuals and families to help develop positive affective evaluations of aged persons. These programs should include characteristics of old age as a stage of life which is experienced by persons who are fortunate to have long life. This requires acceptance by society of aging without attempts to ignore or mask being old. Blau states:

> At every stage of life, an individual requires confirmation of his worth. This confirmation can be obtained through what he does -- his activities that have value -- and through what he is -- his personal qualities that command respect and affection (p. 149).

This should apply to those qualities of being old.

Clarke and Anderson (1967) state the essence of the meaning of this study in these words:

> Although aging is an inevitable biological event, it is nevertheless influenced by the cultural setting in which it occurs (p. 31).

That cultural setting in any society is in flux so that what is amiss or lacking need not continue when that society desires and works toward change.

Conclusions

Two issues become evident upon examining the content and method of procedure of the studies reviewed: (1) whether attitudes or beliefs have been examined and (2) the validity of the criteria which have been used to determine whether the

subjects' attitudes are positive or negative are questionable.

6. DISSEMINATION AND USE

The general purpose for which the findings of this research could be used is to provide valid bases for parent education programs for inter-generational living to create positive environments for those who are presently old and for the future older generations. This may be accomplished through development of the following:

1. Awareness of attitudes that the young may have that may be conscious or unconscious and the effect having these attitudes have on how they interact and react to the aged.

2. Awareness of behavior that may make the aged feel uncomfortable and unwanted.

3. Identification of the sources of attitudes held toward the aged.

4. Helping older adults understand their perceptions about younger people and the effect on their behavior.

5. Providing guides through adult education programs for parents to help young children in families appreciate and evaluate aged persons positively.

6. Providing insight for workers about their behavior toward the aged and old people's feelings to be used in training programs in adult education that prepare workers to work with the aged.

7. Assistance to educators in identifying positive attitudes that allow for education for acceptance of differences in age appropriate behavior for different generations.

The statements below are beliefs and opinions other age groups have about older people. Please indicate whether you feel that each statement is either positive, neutral, or negative by circling the number.

A positive response indicates that you feel the statement is not degrading of old people.

A negative response indicates that you feel the statement is degrading and it bothers you to think that others view old people in this way.

A neutral response indicates that your feelings are neither negative nor positive about the statement and it does not matter to you that other people view old people in this manner.

EXAMPLE

1. Other people believe old people need less sleep than younger people.

5 4 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4 -5

Very Positive — Somewhat Positive — Neutral — Somewhat Negative — Very Negative

2. Other people believe old people feel cold even in warm weather.

5 4 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4 -5

3. Other people believe old people have wrinkled skin.

5 4 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4 -5

4. Other people believe old people walk slowly.

5 4 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4 -5

5. Other people believe old people are proud of their children.

5 4 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4 -5

6. Other people believe old people are a burden to their children.

5 4 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4 -5

7. Other people believe old people are usually supported by their children.

5 4 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4 -5

8. Other people believe old people receive old age pension for support.

5 4 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4 -5

9. Other people believe old people are dependent on their families for help.

5 4 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4 -5

10. Other people believe old people have nothing worth living for after their spouse dies.

5 4 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4 -5

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